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CARE OF BABY CHICKS

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THIS BULLETIN has been written briefly and in simple terms for the beginner, and especially for members of the Boys' and Girls' Poultry Clubs. For additional and more complete information on this subject ask for Farmers' Bulletin 624, "Natural and Artificial Brooding of Chickens."

Contribution from the Bureau of Animal Industry
JOHN R. MOHLER, Chief
Washington, D. C. Issued August, 1920

CARE OF BABY CHICKS.

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THE care of the baby chicks is most important. They must be kept warm and comfortable, have proper feed and water, and be cared for frequently and regularly, if they are to get the start in life that will enable them to develop into large, hardy chicks and mature fowls.

CARE AT HATCHING TIME.

Most boys and girls set eggs and hatch their chicks under hens, which is the best way unless a very large number of chicks is to be raised, in which case an incubator may be used. When the mother hen is hatching she should not be disturbed except to remove the shells, unless she becomes uneasy and steps on or picks the chickens. In such cases the chickens should be removed as soon as dry. Place them in a basket or box lined with flannel or some other soft material and cover the top, keeping the basket or box in a warm place until the eggs left under the hen are hatched.

Hens should be fed as soon as possible after the eggs are hatched, as feeding tends to keep them quiet; otherwise many hens will leave the nest. In most cases it is best that the hen remain on the nest and brood the chickens for at least 24 hours after the hatching is over. Hens will successfully brood 10 to 15 chickens early in the breeding season, and 18 to 25 in warm weather, depending upon the size of the hen, so that often two broods of chicks which hatch at the same time can be put together and raised under one hen.

Powder the hen with a good insect powder or with sodium fluorid two days before the chicks are due to hatch. If lice appear on the chickens, or if they are troubled with "head lice," a very little grease, such as lard or vaseline, may be applied with the fingers on the head, neck, under the wings, and around the vent. Great care

should be taken, however, not to get too much grease on the chickens, as it will stop their growth and in some cases may prove fatal

"Toe punch" or mark each chick before transferring to the brood coop, so that the age can be readily determined after maturity.

KEEP THE CHICKS WARM.

Every poultry-club member should always bear in mind that newly hatched chicks are delicate little fellows and must be treated with care. They hatch in a temperature of 102° to 105° F., and their first and most important requirement for the next 48 hours

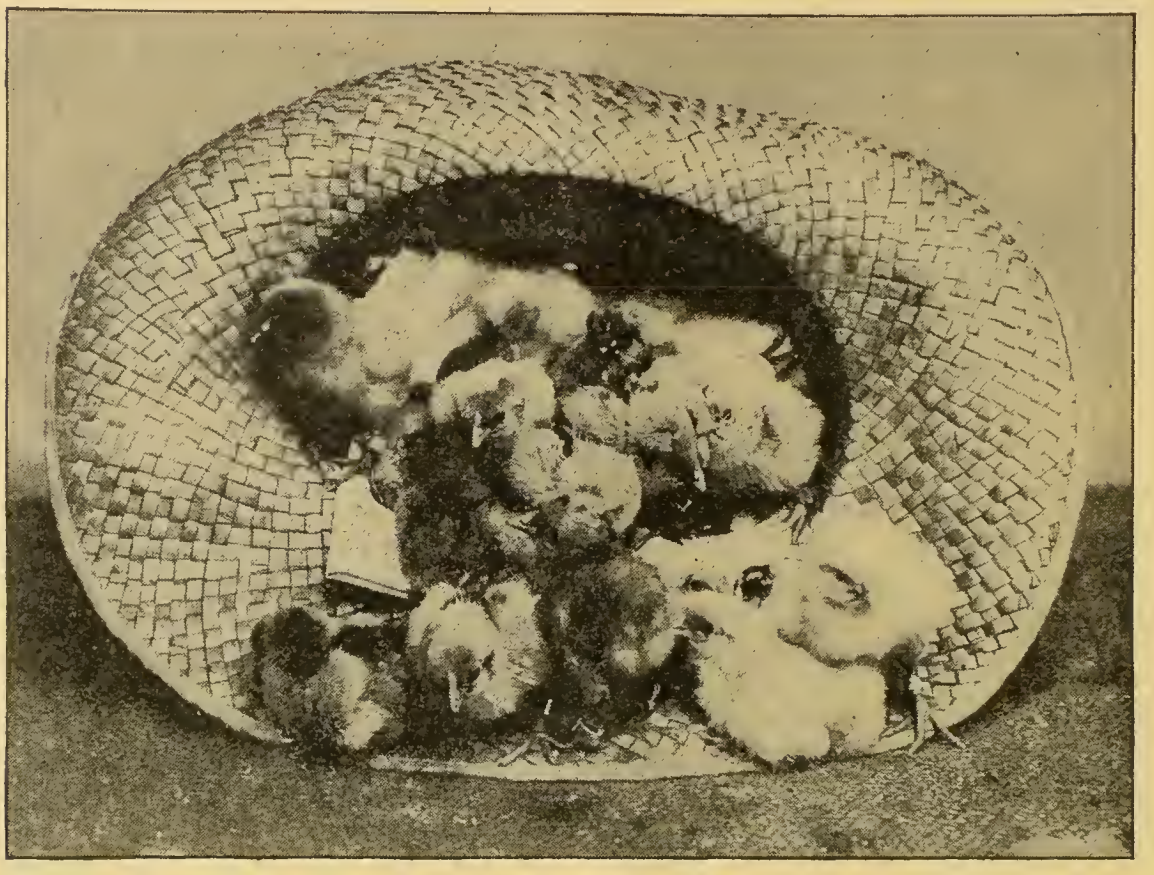

FIG. 1.—A "hatful" of baby chicks just taken from the nest. They were less than 24 hours old when the picture was taken, and only a few were thoroughly awake.

or more is warmth. As soon as the chicks have been taken from the nest or incubator and placed in the brood coop with the mother hen, or in the brooder, they must be kept warm and comfortable until they are old and strong enough to run about and withstand the changes of weather.

When brooded by hens the chicks remain under the mother of their own accord nearly all the time for the first two or three days. The hen should be confined to the brood coop until the chicks are weaned, while the chickens should be allowed free range if possible after they are a few days old.

If they are to be reared in a brooder, the brooder should be warmed to the proper temperature (about 95° F.), regulated and made

ready in advance. Never wait to heat up the brooder until after the chicks have been put in. This same rule applies if you purchase day-old chicks instead of hatching them. Always have the brooder

FIG. 2.—A newly hatched family of baby chicks about to be put into the brood coop with the mother hen and receive their first feed.

ready so that when the chicks reach you they can be transferred at once from the shipping box in which they arrive to the brooder, where it is warm, roomy, and comfortable.

EMERGENCY BROODER.

If the mother hen should die, or if the brooder ordered fails to arrive in time, boys and girls are sometimes at a loss to know what to do with the chicks. In such case a temporary or homemade brooder may be made as follows: Take a box, without cover, about 18 to 24 inches square and 10 inches high. In one side next the

bottom cut an opening 3 inches high and 8 or 10 inches long for the chicks to pass through. Protect this opening with a strip of woolen cloth; tack at the upper edge, having perpendicular slits cut from the lower edge to within one-half inch of the top to allow the chicks to pass through. This box, covered over the top with a heavy blanket or any warm cloth, may be used without heat when the temperature of the room in which the brooder is located is 70° F. or over. If the temperature is lower, however, or if the chicks appear to be cold, take a large bottle or jug and fill it with hot water and place it inside the box, refilling the bottle as often as necessary to keep the chicks warm and comfortable.

FEEDING BABY CHICKS.

Baby chicks should not be fed until 24 to 36 hours after hatching, and will not suffer if not fed until they are 48 hours old. The yolk of the egg which is absorbed by the chick just before hatching furnishes all the nourishment required for the first 2 days. After the second day they should be fed four or five times each day for a week or 10 days, but only a small amount at a time. Chicks will grow faster if fed four or five times each day than if fed only three times, but they should receive only what they will eat up clean each time. Overfeeding will do more harm than underfeeding; therefore care should be taken that only a sufficient amount be given each time to satisfy their hunger and keep them exercising. It is very important that the chickens be fed regularly.

The first feed should consist of baked johnnycake broken up into small pieces, or hard-boiled eggs mixed with stale-bread crumbs or dry oatmeal, using a sufficient amount of the cereal to make a dry, crumbly mixture. These feeds or combinations of feeds may be used with good results for a week; then gradually substitute for one or two feeds each day a mixture of equal parts of finely cracked wheat, cracked corn, and pinhead oatmeal or hulled oats, to which may be added a small quantity of broken rice, millet, rapeseed, or charcoal if obtainable. This mixture makes an ideal ration. If corn can not be had, cracked kafir or rolled or hulled barley may be substituted. A commercial chick feed containing a variety of grains can be bought from most feed dealers and may be used instead of the home mixture if desired.

How to make johnnycake for chicks.

Corn meal	5 pounds.
Infertile eggs (tested out from sittings or from an incubator)	6.
Baking soda	1 tablespoon.

Mix with milk to make a stiff batter, and bake thoroughly.

NOTE.—When infertile eggs are not available use a double quantity of baking soda and add one-third pound of sifted beef scrap.

When the chicks are from 10 days to 2 weeks old use a mash, composed of the following, to take the place of the johnnycake or bread. All ingredients are measured by weight.

2 parts bran.
2 parts middlings or oatmeal.
1 part corn meal.
½ part or 10 per cent sifted meat scrap.

This mash may be placed in a hopper, where it can not be wasted, and left before the chicks at all times, or it may be fed as a moist, crumbly mash once each day, and the grains fed the chicks three times a day. When the chickens are 8 or 10 weeks old add 1 part of ground oats, increase the meat scrap to 1 part, the corn meal to 2 parts, and decrease the bran to 1 part.

As soon as the chickens are old enough and will eat whole wheat, cracked corn, or other grains, the small-sized feed may be discontinued and the larger-sized grains fed to the chickens three times a day. In addition to the grain feed, chickens must be supplied with grit, oyster shell, and charcoal at all times, and the better way is to place these in a hopper, hanging it in a convenient place so that the chicks may help themselves. Use sifted or chick-size grit and oyster shell until the chicks are 8 to 10 weeks old.

If chicks are kept in confinement they must be furnished a liberal supply of tender, green feed, like lawn clippings, sprouted oats, cabbage or lettuce leaves, and such other things as may be available. If the chicks have to be kept confined to a small coop with a yard attached, move the coop and yard to fresh grass or soil every few days or before the grass is killed. Whenever possible, however, chicks should have grass range, when they will obtain their own green feed, and catch bugs and worms. Chicks that are allowed to run on a grass range are usually strong and thrifty and will grow much more rapidly than those that are kept in confinement.

The chickens' growth may be hastened considerably by giving them sour milk to drink in addition to other feeds. Chickens are very fond of milk in any form and will consume a liberal supply of it. Either sweet or sour milk may be fed, but the latter is more desirable. Sour milk will help to keep chickens healthy and is one of the best things that can be fed to promote rapid growth and development. When plenty of milk is fed, the amount of meat scrap in the mash may be reduced one-half or entirely omitted.

FARMERS' BULLETINS ESPECIALLY USEFUL FOR MEMBERS OF BOYS' AND GIRLS' POULTRY CLUBS.

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1106. Incubation of Hens' Eggs.
1107. Brood Coops and Appliances.
1109. Preserving Eggs.
1111. Management of Growing Chicks.
1112. Culling for Eggs and Market.
1113. Poultry Houses.
1114. Common Poultry Diseases.
1115. Selection and Preparation of Fowls for Exhibition.
1116. The Selection and Care of Poultry Breeding Stock.

OTHER FARMERS' BULLETINS ON POULTRY RAISING.

287. Poultry Management.
528. Hints to Poultry Raisers.
574. Poultry House Construction.
585. Natural and Artificial Incubation of Hens' Eggs.
624. Natural and Artificial Brooding of Chickens.
656. The Community Egg Circle.
682. A Simple Trap Nest for Poultry.
684. Squab Raising.
697. Duck Raising.
767. Goose Raising.
791. Turkey Raising.
801. Mites and Lice on Poultry.
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889. Back-Yard Poultry Keeping.
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957. Important Poultry Diseases.
1040. Illustrated Poultry Primer.
1052. Standard Varieties of Chickens: III. The Asiatic, English, and French Classes.
1067. Feeding Hens for Egg Production.

For copies of these bulletins or further information on poultry raising, write to your poultry-club leader, or to the Animal Husbandry Division, Bureau of Animal Industry,

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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